

THE CAPITOL REPORT
Senator Delbert Scott

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Primary Responsibility

It is a little hard to believe, but the time to file legislation for the 2005 session of the Missouri General Assembly is right around the corner. Starting in December, hundreds of House and Senate bills will be filed by Missouri's new class of 197 legislators. Amid all the newspaper headlines that are bound to be written about this novel idea or that controversial proposal, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the legislature really has only one duty that our State Constitution mandates we must perform.

Any guesses as to what that one duty might be? Passing new laws? It currently takes 15 volumes of statute books to print all the laws passed since Missouri became a State. Most people would survive another year just fine if no new laws were passed.

The one duty that the legislature is required to perform to keep the State from coming to a grinding halt is passing a budget. In fact, spending the State's money is one of the main sources of power granted to the legislature by the Missouri Constitution. It is often said that the legislature controls the "purse strings" and nowhere is this "power of the purse" more evident than in the annual pilgrimage that department heads from the executive branch must make to the State Capitol to request dollars to run their agencies for another year. More than one bureaucrat has found himself in the "hot seat" as legislators grill him or her with questions about how money is wasted or policies are being carried out.

Missouri's budget continues to grow and is projected to be well over \$19 billion next year. You might find it interesting to know the main sources of our State's revenue. One of the largest sources is the State income tax that accounts for 25% of the budget. The State sales tax accounts for 10%, and the gas tax accounts for another 8%. However, what may come as a surprise is that the State's biggest single source of revenue is the federal government with over \$7 billion, or around 37% of our budget coming from Washington, D.C. Most of this money is earmarked for specific uses like highways and Medicaid. It may also surprise some to learn that lottery and gambling funds only account for around 8% of the \$4.7 billion Missouri spends on elementary education.

Dividing up a \$19 billion dollar budget is no simple task but it is one that our State Constitution wisely gives to the people's elected representatives. The requirement that officers of the executive branch must submit requests for new funding each year to the legislature is one of the brilliant "checks and balances" woven into our system of government.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, feel free to contact me at: 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us